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STATE MESSAGE

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P 311115Z OCT 73
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5656
INFO RUESQD/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 3264
RUDTC/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0551
RUSBAE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 2932
RUESHR/AMEMBASSY TEHRAN PRIORITY 3253
RUHQHQA/CINCPAC
BT

IRAN / BOUNDARIES

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, AF, IR

SUBJECT: IRANIAN-AFGHAN BORDER CLASH

1. IRANIAN DCM ATABAKI CALLED ON CHARGE OCTG ER 29 ON INSTRUCTION
IRANIAN AMBASSADOR TO BRIEF US ON BACKGROUND AND STATUS OF RECENT
BORDER CLASH NEAR ZARANJI BETWEEN AFGHAN AND IRANIAN GENDARMERIE
CONTINGENTS. HIS VERSION OF INCIDENT FOLLOWS.

2. AREA INVOLVED IS ONE IN WHICH HELMAND RIVER CHANNEL HAS
SHIFTED EASTWARD OVER YEARS, THUS "ANNEXING" PORTION AFGHAN
TERRITORY TO IRAN. (BORDER TRADITIONALLY HAS FOLLOWED RIVER AT
THIS POINT.) FOR A NUMBER OF MONTHS, ACCORDING TO ATABAKI,
IRANIANS HAVE BEEN ASKING PERIODICALLY THAT AFGHANS AGREE TO
SEND DEMARCATION MISSION TO THIS AREA TO ESTABLISH PROPER
BOUNDARY AND INSTALL CONCRETE BOUNDARY MARKERS WHICH HAVE LONG
SINCE DISAPPEARED. HE SAID THIS PARTICULAR AREA WAS NOT SURVEYED
BY JOINT AFGHAN/IRANIAN BORDER COMMISSION LAST YEAR WHICH CARRIED
OUT THIS FUNCTION PRIOR TO SIGNING HELMAND WATERS TREATY (HE DID
NOT EXPLAIN WHY THIS AREA WAS NEGLECTED), SAID THAT IRANIANS WERE
QUITE PREPARED TO ADMIT THAT BORDER SHOULD BE PLACED WEST OF

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EXISTING CHANNEL SO THAT AFGHANISTAN NOT LOSE TERRITORY INADVERTENTLY; THIS PRINCIPLE COULD BE IMPLEMENTED ONLY IF MISSION SENT TO AREA. HE SAID AFGHANS HAD AGREED REPEATEDLY BUT FOR INEXPLICABLE REASONS ALWAYS FAILED TO ACT.

3. PRIOR TO JULY REVOLUTION, LOCAL IRANIAN GENDARMERIE COMMANDER HAD INFORMAL UNDERSTANDING WITH HIS AFGHAN COUNTERPART THAT PENDING DEFINITIVE DEMARCATION BY THEIR GOVERNMENTS NO AGRICULTURAL WORK WOULD BE CARRIED OUT BY AFGHANS WEST OF EXISTING RIVER CHANNEL, NOR WOULD ANY AFGHAN MILITARY PATROLS GO WEST OF CHANNEL. AFTER REVOLUTION A NEW GENDARMERIE LTC ASSUMED COMMAND. APPROXIMATELY THREE WEEKS AGO HE WARNED HIS IRANIAN COUNTERPART THAT HE WOULD ASSERT AFGHAN RIGHTS TO THIS AREA. HE WAS ASKED TO ADHERE TO PRIOR STATUS QUO AGREEMENT. HOWEVER, ON ABOUT OCTOBER 24, 100 MEN FROM AFGHAN GENDARMERIE ESCORTED APPROXIMATELY 50 CIVILIAN CULTIVATORS INTO DISPUTED AREA, TRIGGERING FIREFIGHT WITH IRANIAN GENDARMERIE. ATABAKI SAID FOUR AFGHAN GENDARMERIE WERE KILLED AND SEVEN TAKEN PRISONER. PROTESTS WERE MADE BY BOTH SIDES ALMOST SIMULTANEOUSLY THE FOLLOWING MORNING IN ISLAMABAD AND KABUL. TENSION ROSE RAPIDLY, BUT AFTER SEVERAL DIPLOMATIC EXCHANGES, AFGHANS FINALLY AGREED OCTOBER 28 TO IRANIAN PROPOSAL THAT AN INVESTIGATING MISSION GO IMMEDIATELY TO ZARANJ TO INSPECT SITUATION ON THE GROUND. ATABAKI SAID IRANIANS ARE PREPARED TO RETURN THEIR PRISONERS, BUT ONLY AFTER OFFICIALS FROM KABUL VIEWED BODIES WHERE THEY LAY AND SAW EVIDENCE THAT THE FIGHTING TOOK PLACE WEST OF THE EXISTING IRANIAN BORDER POINTS. HE SAID HE BELIEVED THAT DESPITE THE DESPATCH OF AFGHAN REINFORCEMENTS FROM KANDAHAR TO ZARANJ, THAT BORDER WAS NOW AND WOULD REMAIN QUIET. LEWIS

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